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THE CONCENTRATION OF SCHOOLS AND TRANSPORTATION OF PUPILS

By MR. G. P. GLENN, Superintendent of Schools, Jacksonville, Florida

An up-to-date educational journal wisely suggests that the social philosophers who are seeking an explanation for the rush of the rural population to the city should turn their eyes upon the district school. It is undoubtedly one of the overlooked causes.

Thousands of country people sell or rent their farms and go into town in order to give their children educational advantages which they cannot have in the country schools as they are at present conducted.

The pronounced educational advantages of the city are irresistibly attractive to the enterprising American, who always believes in the efficacy of education. If the schools of the city are to remain so incomparably better than those of the country, the exodus of the farmers to the city will continue.

A generation ago this incomparable difference did not exist, neither did there then exist a well-developed art of teaching, such as we see applied in our city schools to-day, but not in our rural schools. This is a second difference quite adequate to cause the first.

As a verification of this cause, we find the art of learning very generally well developed among pupils of city schools, while it is displayed in rural schools by only a few—a few mental giants of whom Cicero, in his comments on the genius of nature and the genius of industry, says: "Something marvelous may be expected from the youth who has both." These rare combinations of genius, in the past, have performed the wonderful feat of capturing the art of learning, despite the adverse conditions of the rural school. Unfortunately, they do not represent the masses of country school-children. Dr. Hinsdale says: "One of the most valuable arts that a boy or girl, a young man or young woman, can learn is the art of study." Jefferson Davis, in a letter to a Mississippi teacher, has incidentally left us the following excellently worded pedagogic thought: "The art of learning and the endowment to teach must both be developed in youth."

If then we note correctly that this all-important art of study or art of learning is quite apparent among pupils of the city school, but generally dormant among pupils of rural schools, we have discovered adequate cause for the incomparable excellence of the city school, and we who have charge of rural education should hasten to engraft that cause into the country schools with all possible speed.

Much of the inferiority of the country school is due to the county superintendent. He should have long ago discovered that the application and the very existence of the art of teaching has been possible in the city school, because of its peculiar organization, and impossible in the rural school because of its peculiar lack of organization. He ought to have had the professional sagacity to note that this lack of organization was due to his own delinquency. Added to such discernment and sagacity, he should have had force of character sufficient to abandon the old rural system for something better. During the last decade nearly all the Northern states, from Maine and Massachusetts through to Minnesota, have adopted, to some extent, the plan of centralizing rural schools as a means of improving them.

Massachusetts was the pioneer by many years and has very definite legislation upon the subject. Pennsylvania newspapers are filled with enthusiasm over the prospect of an early state management of the new system. Ohio has long since carried her Kingsville centralized school far beyond the pale of experiment, and has brought it into national repute. Indiana and Illinois superintendents are making pilgrimages to Ohio's Mecca, the school at Kingsville, to inspect its mode of operating, while Wisconsin and Mississippi and North Carolina write to Florida seeking our experience and method of transportation in Duval County, in connection with our centralization of rural schools during the last six years.

In this county six years ago there were forty-five rural schools of one teacher each, for white children, established by former administrations. The work of these schools was so unsatisfactory in general, and the per capita of expense ran so high in many of them, that the present administration determined to reduce the number to fifteen schools of three teachers each.

A statutory clause of the state provides that school children

must not be required to walk to school more than one mile and a half. Hence, in choosing the sites for the centralized schools, the one having the greatest number of children within a radius of one mile and a half has generally been chosen. Seven of these schools are now in operation, each accommodating the children of about sixty to one hundred square miles of territory. Others will be established as rapidly as funds will permit.

The concentration of the children who live more than one mile and a half from these new schools is accomplished by means of wagonettes, specially designed for the purpose, and provided by the Board of Public Instruction at the public expense. They are of such capacity as to carry eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, sixteen, eighteen and twenty pupils, respectively, and cost from seventy to one hundred dollars each. Last year twenty-seven of these comfortable vehicles were running at an average cost of \$23.33 1-3. These twenty-seven conveyances enabled us to close twenty-four of the old one-teacher schools, the current cost of which had previously been forty-five dollars and fifty cents per month for each. Hence, our transportation system now in operation produces a current saving of four hundred and sixty-two dollars per month over the old method. This gross saving was reduced by two hundred and twenty-five dollars, the increase in salaries for assistant teachers at the centralized schools, and there was still left a net saving of two hundred and thirty-seven dollars per month. During a single term of eight months this net saving amounts almost to the entire cost of the twenty-seven wagons, and, since the life of a well-made wagon is about five years, four-fifths of this saving can be devoted to the extension of the new system and to better facilities for teaching. Therefore, even in a financial way, centralization in Duval County, Florida, is a decided success.

Professionally there seems to be nothing objectionable, and of the many advantages the following are the more important:

1. The teachers' work is so well organized that the average recitation period is doubled.
2. The effort of the teacher is made more effective by means of a more adequate equipment.
3. Truancy is wholly eliminated. The health of the pupils is preserved against bad weather and worse roads, but especially from the impure drinking water of former days.

4. Many children, formerly so isolated as never to have access to any school, are now accommodated, to the advantage of the system financially.

5. Local prejudice and family feuds are so completely submerged that one or two large families cannot freeze out the teacher.

6. As a sequence to all these favorable conditions, the average attendance is increased 12 1-2 per cent, giving a corresponding increase of school funds from the state.

7. The country maiden may, and does, continue her education, even into the appreciative days of womanhood, without fear of molestation by the ubiquitous tramp or other vagabond.

8. The youth prolongs his school days to the ambitious verging into manhood, because his aspirations for intellectual progress have been encouraged—he has been given time and opportunity to think and to talk.

9. The farmer and his family are becoming more content with their independent, self-sustaining occupation, preferring to have their children educated in these efficient rural schools, where, during the character-forming period of youth, ethical culture is free from the dissipations of social life as manifested in our cities.

10. The development of the art of teaching by young aspirants is more feasible to the superintendent. His efforts at supervision are more frequent and more effective. On his rounds of duty, and at sight of the old, abandoned school-houses, he thinks of Whittier's lines :

"Still sits the school-house by the road,
A ragged beggar, sunning."

Simply sunning, each a moss-covered monument, befitting the raggedest, most beggarly system of rural education ever devised by man, and an appropriate epitaph on each would be, "Now departed, but not lamented."